

Congressman Nadler Celebrates Meaning of Valentines Day by Introducing "Permanent Partners Immigration Act"

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WASHINGTON — Using the motif of Valentines Day as a backdrop, Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today reintroduced of "The Permanent Partners Immigration Act" today, which would help countless numbers of bi-national gay and lesbian partnerships to remain together. Joining Rep. Nadler were representatives from the leading gay and lesbian groups in the nation, as well as the most respected civil liberties group in the nation. Meanwhile, at City Hall in San Francisco, activists rallied in support of the legislation. Just last week, there was a rally in New York City to support a resolution in City Council which would give the endorsement of the City of New York to "The Permanent Partners Immigration Act";

The most prominent feature of the "The Permanent Partners Immigration Act" would allow those US Citizens and lawful permanent residents who are in a permanent partnership, to sponsor their partners for immigration purposes, just as any legal spouse would. Currently, because there is no legally recognized marriage between gay and lesbian couples under the immigration law, many bi-national permanent partnerships are torn apart when one partner moves to the United States.

"I think introducing a bill which aims to keep loving and committed relationships together is a perfect way to celebrate Valentines Day," said Rep. Nadler.

"My bill is simply a matter of common sense and fairness," he added. "Why do we allow the government to tear apart committed and loving couples just because of who they love? The answer is that there is no excuse for this gratuitous cruelty, and my bill would correct that."

Rep. Nadler was joined at the press conference by Liz McGrail of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force (LGIRTF), Winnie Stachelberg of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and Christopher Anders of the American Civil Liberties Union. Also attending were many people who personally have been affected by the current immigration code.

"The Permanent Partners Immigration Act" would add the term "or permanent partner" to those sections of the Immigration and Naturalization Act that apply to legally married couples. For purposes of the bill, "permanent partner" is described as "an individual 18 years of age and over who: Is in a committed, intimate relationship with another individual 18 years of age and over in which both parties intend a lifelong commitment; Is financially interdependent with that other individual; Is not married or in a permanent partnership with anyone other than that other individual; Is unable to contract with that other individual a marriage cognizable under [the Immigration and Naturalization Act]; and Is not a first, second, or third degree blood relation of that other individual."

"This bill will help end the unjust and cruel separation of families," says HRC Political Director Winnie Stachelberg. "We applaud Congressman Nadler for taking this initiative and recognizing that immigration law is supposed to be based on protecting families and not tearing them apart based on sexual orientation."

"The United States is far behind the curve in granting immigration rights to same-sex couples, as 14 other countries have already done so with no problem," said Suzanne B. Goldberg, chairperson of the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force. "Valentine's Day is a painful reminder that our immigration law, which is supposed to keep families together, actually tears U.S. citizens apart from their foreign same-sex partners. The Permanent Partners Immigration Act is the key to solving this horrific situation."

"Family unification has always been at the heart of U.S. immigration policy. But as it stands, federal law prevents lesbians and gay men from keeping their families," said Christopher Anders, legislative counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union. "Instead of intruding into people's private relationships, Congress should enact fair immigration standards that apply equally to everyone."

While the bill will afford the same immigration benefits to permanent partnerships that those who contract a legal marriage receive, it will also apply the same exact restrictions and enforcement standards. For example, if a person is found to have entered into a fraudulent permanent partnership for the purposes of obtaining a visa for another person, they will be subject to the same five year maximum imprisonment, or \$250,000 maximum fine, or both, as a person who contracts a fraudulent marriage would. The bill also requires that bi-national couples provide ample proof that they meet the definition of "permanent partners";

"My bill only demands that those people in same-sex permanent partnerships receive equal treatment to those who can get legally married," said Rep. Nadler. "Not an iota more."

Currently Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, and the United Kingdom all allow people to sponsor their permanent partners for immigration purposes.

Representative Nadler has served in Congress since 1992 where he has worked on many issues of importance to the gay and lesbian community. He represents the 8th District of New York which includes parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

For a copy of the bill, or the text of Rep. Nadler's remarks, please contact his Washington office at 202-225-5635.

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